

Miami Book Fair announces first recipients of Emerging Writer Fellowships program

By **Norma Ardila** - March 9, 2021

Miami Dade College's (MDC) Miami Book Fair (MBF) recently announced the first winners of its new Emerging Writer Fellowships (EWF) program, which actively helps to establish the literary careers of developing writers who demonstrate exceptional talent and promise and are working on completing a book-length project within a year.

Made possible by the Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation at The Miami Foundation, this year's recipients are 'Pemi Aguda, Gabriel Ramirez and Joseph Earl Thomas.

"This program truly reflects our mission to seek out, encourage, and offer concrete resources to exciting new writers," said Lissette Mendez, MBF's director of programs.

"Providing relevant tools and a platform to an inclusive group of creative thinkers — who have important things to share and teach us — is an embodiment of what Miami Book Fair does."

Fellowship recipients will enjoy critical mentorship from a nationally established author in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, as well as a host of other strategic supports, including professional experience in arts administration, the opportunity to teach creative writing, a \$41,000 stipend, and strong literary community support to allow for 12 months of uninterrupted time to craft their works.

"The spirit of the Emerging Writer Fellowships program and its goals closely align with our efforts to support programs and initiatives that invest in our community, amplify diverse thought, and promote representation," said Belissa Alvarez, director of the Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation/Related Philanthropic Foundation. "All of these factors drive social change and foster empowerment, and we're thrilled to be a part of that work through Miami Book Fair."

Meet the 2021 Emerging Writer Fellowship recipients and their mentors:

'Pemi Aguda – 2021 Fiction Fellow

Hailing from Lagos, Nigeria, and a graduate of the Helen Zell Writers' Program, 'Pemi Aguda's work has been supported by the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, an Octavia Butler Memorial Scholarship from the Carl Brandon Society, and the Emerging Writer Fellowship from Aspen Summer Words. Her novel manuscript won the 2020 Deborah Rogers Foundation Writers Award.

Aguda will be mentored by writer Edwidge Danticat, author of several books, including *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, an Oprah Book Club selection; *Krik? Krak!*, a National Book Award finalist; *The Farming of Bones*, an American Book Award winner, and *The Art of Death*, a National Books Critics Circle finalist.

She also is the editor of *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*. Her memoir, *Brother, I'm Dying*, was a 2007 finalist for the National Book Award and a 2008 winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for autobiography. Her most recent book, *Everything Inside: Stories*, is the winner of the Bocas Prize for fiction, The Story Prize, and the National Books Critics Circle Award in fiction.



Gabriel Ramirez – 2021 Poetry Fellow

Gabriel Ramirez is a queer Afro-Latinx poet, activist, and teaching artist who has received fellowships from The Conversation Literary Arts Festival, Palm Beach Poetry Festival, The Watering Hole, and CantoMundo. He has performed on Broadway in New York at the New Amsterdam Theatre, United Nations, Lincoln Center, Apollo Theatre, and other venues and universities around the nation.

Ramirez's work has been featured in The Huffington Post, Vibe magazine, and on Remezcla.com, as well as in *Bettering American Poetry Anthology* (Bettering Books, 2017), *What Saves Us: Poems of Empathy and Outrage in the Age of Trump* (Northwestern University Press, 2019), and *The Breakbeat Poets Vol. 4: LatiNEXT* (Haymarket Press, 2020).

Ramirez will be mentored by Juan Felipe Herrera, the 21st Poet Laureate of the United States (2015-16) and the first Latino to hold the position. From 2012 to 2014, Herrera served as California State Poet Laureate. His many collections of poetry include *Every Day We Get More Illegal*; *Notes on the Assemblage*; *Senegal Taxi*; *Half of the World in Light: New and Selected Poems*, a recipient of the PEN/Beyond Margins Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *187 Reasons Mexicanos Can't Cross the Border: Undocuments 1971-2007*. Herrera also is the author of *Crashboomlove: A Novel in Verse*, which received the Americas Award. He also is a performance artist and activist on behalf of migrant and Indigenous communities and at-risk youth.

Joseph Earl Thomas – 2021 Nonfiction Fellow

Joseph Earl Thomas is a writer from Northeast Philadelphia whose work has appeared in *The Offing*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Kenyon Review* magazines. His writing primarily concerns the relationships between fantasy, feelings, and possibility.

Thomas will be mentored by journalist Ada Calhoun, author of the New York Times bestseller *Why We Can't Sleep: Women's New Midlife Crisis*, an expansion of her viral story for Oprah.com about the unique circumstances faced by Generation X women, named "the best nonfiction book of the year so far" by Amazon editors last summer. Her last two nonfiction books, both Amazon Books of the Month, are the New York City history *St. Marks Is Dead: The Many Lives of America's Hippest Street*, and the memoir *Wedding Toasts I'll Never Give*. She has written for *Time*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The New Republic*, and *Billboard*; her essays and op-eds have appeared on *NewYorker.com* and in *The New York Times*.

Funding for EWF was provided by the Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation through The Pérez CreARTE Grants Program. Miami Book Fair was awarded \$100,000 to launch this initiative.

Other EWF partners and funders include the Green Family Foundation, Jerome A. Yavitz Charitable Foundation Inc., Miami Dade College, and Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs.

Founded in 1984 by Miami Dade College and partners, Miami Book Fair engages the community through inclusive, accessible programs that promote reading and support writers year-round. The annual eight-day festival has grown into the largest and most comprehensive community-rooted literary gathering in the United States generating discourse on contemporary literature and current issues of international importance. Throughout the rest of the year, Miami Book Fair responds hosts an ongoing schedule of activities, including *The Little Haiti Book Festival*; creative writing and publishing workshops; author presentations; reading campaigns; and *Read to Learn Books for Free*, a partnership with *The Children's Trust* that distributes more than 150,000 free books a year to children in Miami-Dade County.

Miami Book Fair programming is made possible through generous support from the State of Florida and the National Endowment for the Arts; City of Miami; Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council; Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; Miami-Dade County Public Schools; Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau;



Miami Downtown Development Authority; and Friends of the Fair; as well as many corporate partners. Miami Book Fair: Building community, one reader at a time.

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